



RSC ACTIVITY TOOLKIT



THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

1 - THE STORY

What kind of journey does this play take the audience on?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#) and watch [this clip](#).

ACTIVITY

- Read through the 10 plot points on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [page](#). Write a list of any words that stand out or interest you, even if you don't know what they mean.
- Read the plot points out loud as if you are a news reporter telling the people of Venice. Which words might you have to change to make it sound as if the events are happening live?
- On a piece of paper, write out your news report based on these plot points. Decide which bits of information will be most interesting to your viewers and add any details you can find.
- Practice reading your news bulletin out loud. Which parts sound the most dramatic or emotional?
- Ask yourself: Which bits of the plot are you most interested in already? Which characters do you want to know more about?
- Watch RSC Associate Director Polly Findlay talk through the story of the play for her 2015 RSC production [here](#).

EXTENSION

- Create your own storyboard of the plot for a comic book or graphic novel. You can make this as big or as colourful as you like.
- Start by choosing one plot point and make a list of all the things that happen in it. Divide your paper into squares or panels so that you have one for each thing on your list. Draw a picture within each square until you have your story complete.
- You can do this with as many plot points as you like, even adding lines from the play in speech bubbles or characters thoughts and reactions.

2 - THE CHARACTERS

What kind of people live in the world of this play?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write and draw with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy Act 1 Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice*, on the page or on screen to read.

ACTIVITY

- Choose one character from the opening scene of the play that interests you and that you would like to create a Mind Map for. This might be the character you like best or someone you think is important in the plot.
- Read through the opening scene, making a list of everything you can find that is important for your character. These might be: people they talk about, things they do, interesting words they say, how others describe them.
- Take a fresh piece of paper and write your character's name in the middle. Imagining this paper is your character's mind, start to fill the page with words or drawings from your list. If you think something or someone is important to your character, place it nearer their name. You can make this map as full and colourful as you like.
- Visit the Who's Who page on the RSC Learning Zone [here](#). Choose any other character and create a labelled diagram for them, using the information on this page. Again, you can write down key words or use illustrations.
- Ask yourself: Which words have you decided to write and which have you illustrated with pictures? What colours have you used? What does this tell you about your character?

EXTENSION

- Design a private room for your favourite character to live in. Now you know more about them and what they are like, see if you can imagine how they would live.
- If you feel very ambitious, you can build a model box of this room and making their personal possessions and clothes out of modelling clay or scrap material or paper. Don't forget to make your character too and put them in it! Photograph or film your character in their room. How do they behave in their own space?

3 - THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Why did Shakespeare choose to set the play in Venice and Belmont?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- Old newspapers, magazines OR a mood board app such as Mural or Pinterest.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the photo gallery of Settings on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). What do these images tell you about the world of the play? What is it like? How might life be different for Christians and Jewish people? Write down any words or images that come to mind.
- Take a look at the 'Did you know' about Belmont. What is it like? Write down any words or images that come to mind. How might the different communities in Venice and Belmont relate to each other? Look at the words you have written down so far.
- Create a mood board for the world of *The Merchant of Venice*, either digitally using an app or as a collage using your own drawings or old newspapers and magazines. A mood board can help a designer to think about the overall impression they want the audience to have of a place and can be a collection of colours, textures, fabrics, styles of clothing, buildings, art work and anything else that you see which inspires you. Include all the places in the play. In your mood board, try to label the things you add to help you remember your thought process.
- Ask yourself: What did the world of Venice and Belmont mean to Shakespeare's audience? Where could the modern versions of this world be today?

EXTENSION

- Create your own Model Box for a production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Use drawings or mood boards to start your design so you are happy with it. Where will your audience sit? How will your actors enter and exit? What scenery will you have - if any?
- When your model box is finished, practise explaining how it works to an imaginary director and cast of actors. Where will some of the scenes take place in your model? The Venetian Court? The choosing of the caskets?

4 - ANTONIO AND BASSANIO

What is at stake between Antonio and Bassanio?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit these pages on [Relationships](#) and [Language Analysis](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Relationships page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Try filtering the relationships for 'friendship' and 'love'. There are many questions about the nature of the relationships in the play.
- Deciding why Antonio helps Bassanio is key to understanding and interpreting the play. Click on 'View the Information' and read the information about Antonio and Bassanio. Note the clues about these characters and their relationship in Act 1 Scene 1.
- Find the place in Act 1 Scene 1 where Solanio says, "Why then, you are in love." Read from there, until he says, "Because you are not sad."
- Try saying Solanio's lines aloud as if he genuinely does not know why Antonio is sad.
- Now, try saying Solanio's lines aloud as if he thinks that Antonio must be secretly in love.
- Ask yourself: which felt the most appropriate to you and why?
- Visit the Language Analysis page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#) and click on 'Analysing Imagery' then 'wealth and possessions'. Click on 'Read Act 1 Scene 1 extract' and read what happens between Antonio and Bassanio once they are left alone by their friends.
- Using the clues from Act 1 Scene 1, decide what might have happened between Antonio and Bassanio before the play starts. Ask yourself: How did they meet? For what reasons might Antonio have lent money previously? How might Bassanio have lost that money? Why does Antonio keep lending Bassanio money? You may have several ideas. Write them down.
- Imagine you are Antonio at the end of Act 1 Scene 1. Write a blog as if you are him, titled: "All the world's a stage where every man must play his part", in which you explain why you are prepared to help Bassanio and put your credit on the line for him.

EXTENSION

- Write a series of other blog entries as Antonio. Start with the day you met Bassanio: where was it, what happened, how and when did you meet? You could take selfies as Antonio, to illustrate your blog, showing your attitude and feelings. You could even find costume that might be appropriate for your Antonio selfies.
- Visit the Past Productions page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#), to investigate the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio in RSC past productions.

5 - PORTIA'S SUITORS

Why does Portia reject her suitors?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 2 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Characters page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on Portia to read the detailed information.
- Find the place in Act 1 Scene 2 where Portia says, "O me, the word choose!" and read until Portia says, "I will do anything, Nerissa, ere I will be married to a sponge."
- Choose one of the suitors that Portia and Nerissa talk about.
- Imagine that suitor has an online dating profile. Make that profile, either working on paper or using digital technology. Include what their age might be, where they are from, what they might look like, and what they might say about themselves and what they want. Draw him or find a suitable photograph to represent him. Label your image, using your own words and what Portia says about him.
- Ask yourself: Why does Portia reject this suitor?
- Find the place in Act 1 Scene 2 where Portia says, "If I live to be as old as Sibylla." and read to the end of the scene.
- Make yourself a dating profile for Portia, including what she might say about herself and what she wants.
- Ask yourself: Why does Portia reject her suitors?

EXTENSION

- Choose other suitors that Portia and Nerissa talk about in Act 1 Scene 2, and make dating profiles for them.
- Imagine you are Portia. Write a letter to your father, explaining how you feel about the casket challenge he has set, and expressing how you hope you will find a husband.

6 - PREJUDICE

What prejudices are there between Shylock and Antonio?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit these pages on [Relationships](#) and [Language Analysis](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 3 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Relationship page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on 'view the information' and read what it says about Antonio and Shylock.
- Find the place in Act 1 Scene 3 where Shylock says, "Three thousand ducats: I think I may take his bond." Read from there until Antonio says, "Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you?"
- Make a list of any facts: things that you find out from the script which are true. For example, *Shylock is a money lender*.
- Make a list of inferences: things you think might be true. For example, what the characters are feeling.
- Make a list of questions: things you want to know after reading this section.
- Ask yourself: Why won't Shylock eat with Antonio and Bassanio? Why does Shylock disapprove of Antonio lending out money 'gratis'? Why does Antonio say, "The devil can cite scripture for his purpose"?
- Read aloud Shylock's next speech, which begins "Signior Antonio, many a time and oft". Every time you say 'you', point as if you are pointing at Antonio. Every time you say 'I', 'me' or 'mine', touch your heart. Ask yourself: How do the pronouns help us to understand the impact of Shylock's words?
- Write down all the names that Shylock claims Antonio has called him.
- Ask yourself: What prejudices are there between Shylock and Antonio?

EXTENSION

- Visit the Language Analysis page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on 'Analysing Shylock's language', read the information and follow the instructions to read aloud and analyse Shylock's speech from Act 1 Scene 3 in more detail, using RSC rehearsal techniques. You can complete and print the grid if you like, and carry on by clicking, 'What else can I do to analyse Shylock's language?'

7 - SHYLOCK AND ANTONIO'S BOND

Why and how do Shylock and Antonio agree to the bond?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 3 from The Merchant of Venice, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Language page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on the link explore and ask yourself questions about the scene.
- Make paper cutouts to represent the characters, or use everyday household objects. Read the scene aloud, and move your representations as you read, with 'Shylock' still, and 'Antonio' and 'Bassanio' moving around him.
- Read the scene aloud again, this time with 'Antonio' and 'Bassanio' still and 'Shylock' moving around them.
- Ask yourself: Who is challenging who, when and why during this scene? Why and how do Shylock and Antonio agree to the bond?
- Watch the film of RSC actors playing this scene from our 2015 production, on the [same page](#).
- Ask yourself: How do the actors come across in this version?
- Imagine you are the director of this scene. Write or record your notes for how you would like this scene to be brought to life in performance, including how the actors should move in relation to each other and why.

EXTENSION

- The last two lines of this scene are a 'rhyming couplet'. Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#) and click on 'Rhyming couplets' to explore how RSC actors work with rhyming couplets in rehearsal.
- Add to your directors notes how you would like to see the final rhyming couplet of Act 1 Scene 3 of the Merchant of Venice brought to life, and why.

8 - LANCELOT GOBBO

In which ways might Lancelot Gobbo make the audience laugh?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 2 Scene 2 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Relationships page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click to view the information and scroll down to read information and key quotes about Lancelot Gobbo, to help you interpret this character and his role in the play.
- Read Lancelot Gobbo's first speech in Act 2 Scene 2.
- Write a list of all the reasons why Lancelot Gobbo should stay working for Shylock, and all the reasons why he should leave.
- Lancelot is described in the stage directions as 'the clown', which could indicate that he was played originally by Shakespeare's company clown, Will Kemp.
- One of the challenges of this speech is to make it as funny as possible. Find two objects: one to represent the 'fiend' – or devil – and one to represent the 'conscience' – or truth – that Lancelot mentions. These could be soft toys or any other household object you have to hand.
- Hold your fiend in one hand and your conscience in the other. Read the speech aloud, using exaggerated voices for the fiend and the conscience as if they are speaking to Lancelot, one in each ear. Use exaggerated movements for your fiend and conscience as they speak, as if they are reacting emotionally and giving Lancelot conflicting advice.
- Film yourself speaking the speech, using your fiend and conscience.
- Watch the film and ask yourself: which are the funniest moments in this speech and why?

EXTENSION

- Read Act 2 Scene 3, in which Lancelot says goodbye to Jessica.
- Ask yourself: Before the characters start speaking in the scene, what might Lancelot be doing to make Jessica laugh? How might Lancelot react to the letter that Jessica gives him?
- Ask yourself: How does having a clown in the play add to our understanding of the world the characters live in?
- Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#) to investigate how Lancelot Gobbo has been portrayed on stage at the RSC.

9 - JESSICA LEAVES HOME

How and why does Jessica leave home?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 2 Scenes 4, 5 and 6 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or on a screen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Relationships page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click to view the information and scroll down to read information and key quotes to help you interpret Jessica and her actions.
- Read Lorenzo's last speech in Act 2 Scene 4, which begins, "*I must needs tell thee all*".
- Using the clues in Lorenzo's speech, imagine you are Jessica and write the letter she sends to Lorenzo, outlining her plan to leave home.
- Read aloud Act 2 Scene 5, from where Jessica enters to the end of the scene. As you read, imagine the secret thoughts and feelings that Jessica has during this scene, and write them down.
- Shylock goes out at the end of Scene 5, and Scene 6 opens with Lorenzo and his friends gathering outside Shylock's house. There is a 'masque' in Venice, a street party in which the partygoers wear masks to disguise their identity.
- Read Act 2 Scene 6, from where Jessica enters 'above', wearing boy's clothes, to where Jessica and Lorenzo exit.
- Choose 10 words which you think are the most important in the scene.
- Speak your chosen words aloud and make a strong gesture to go with each word, using your tone of voice and body language to express the meaning of each word.
- Ask yourself: Why does Jessica decide to leave home? How does she go about making that happen?

EXTENSION

- Design a costume for Jessica to wear when she leaves home. She is in boy's clothes and wearing a mask. Do some research online to find out more about Venetian masks and think carefully about Jessica's character, and the situation she is in, before you choose your final design.
- Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on 'family and loyalty' to ask yourself some of the questions that would be asked in the RSC rehearsal room when staging a performance of the play.

10 - GOSSIP

How does the point of view that Shakespeare creates affect the audience's understanding of the play?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A copy of Act 2 Scene 8 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Read Act 2 Scene 8, from the beginning to Salarino's line, "*Crying his stones, his daughter and his ducats.*"
- Write a list of all the events that are gossiped about in this section, including everything Salarino and Solanio say has been done or said.
- Think about what Shylock and the Duke might have been experiencing during those events. Bear in mind that the Duke is Christian, and it is his job to rule Venice.
- Imagine you are Shylock. Now write the story of what has happened, as if you are Shylock speaking to his friend Tubal.
- Now imagine you are the Duke. Write the story of what has happened, as if you are the Duke speaking to another important gentleman of Venice.
- Compare the ways in which the story changed according to whose point of view it was told from.
- Continue reading Act 2 Scene 8, from Solanio's line "*Let good Antonio look he keep his day*" to the end of the scene.
- Salarino reports Bassanio and Antonio parting. Write a new scene between Bassanio and Antonio, no more than ten lines long, showing that parting in more detail. Use Salarino's speech as inspiration. You can include stage directions to help the audience to understand exactly where, and how the scene takes place.

EXTENSION

- Imagine you are a gossip columnist writing about the events in Act 2 Scene 8.
- First decide which newspaper you write your column for. Are you writing for a paper funded by The Duke, or are you writing for a paper read by the Jewish community?
- Write your gossip column, bearing in mind who will read it. Remember to include all the events in Act 2 Scene 8.

11 - IF YOU PRICK US, DO WE NOT BLEED?

What exercises do actors at the RSC do to explore a speech?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone page on Shylock's speech, [here](#). Read and explore the scene.
- Read Shylock's speech aloud. As you read, make gestures that go with the words, that help you to express what the words mean. Remember to include the pronouns.
- Ask yourself: Why do you think Shylock uses so many words that are about the human body? What is the effect of that imagery? What is Shylock saying about being human? How does emphasizing the pronouns affect your understanding of the speech?
- Read the speech aloud again. As you read aloud, stand up on the first full stop, sit down on the next one, and then continue standing up or sitting down every time you come to a full stop or question mark. When you come to a comma, stamp your foot.
- Actors explore punctuation in this way because the punctuation indicates the characters thoughts moving from one thought to another. Ask yourself: What is the pattern of Shylock's thoughts in this speech? How do you think he is feeling? Why might that be?
- Ask yourself: How many questions are there in this speech? Shylock either answers his own questions or asks questions that have an obvious answer. These are rhetorical questions. What is the effect of Shylock asking so many rhetorical questions in this speech?
- Write a short explanation of what the language of this speech reveals about Shylock, using your answers to the questions you have asked yourself.
- Watch the film of RSC actors performing this scene [here](#).
- Ask yourself: How does Shylock come across in this version? How does this compare with your first impression?

EXTENSION

- Visit the photo gallery of this moment in past RSC productions [here](#).
- Ask yourself: How obvious is Shylock's faith in these images? If you were staging this moment, what might Shylock be wearing, and why?

- Design a costume for Shylock to wear in this scene. Choose carefully what colours, fabrics and design you might use. Label your design with the reasons for your choices.

12 - THE CASKET SCENE

What exercises do RSC actors use to explore a scene?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit these pages on [Language Analysis](#) and [The Casket Scene](#).

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone page exploring Act 3 Scene 2 [here](#), and read the description of the scene.
- Ask yourself: At the beginning of this section, what does each character want? Write these down. In rehearsals, we call these objectives. What does each character fear? We call these obstacles for the characters. Write them down as well.
- Put Bassanio's first speech into your own words. In rehearsals, we call this paraphrasing. Write your paraphrase down.
- Ask yourself: Why does Bassanio reject the gold and silver caskets, and choose the lead one? Which words from this speech help us to understand his reasons?
- Read Portia's speech aloud, exaggerating the sounds in the words. Make the most of the vowel sounds, and speak the consonant sounds as precisely as you can, paying particular attention to any repeated sounds.
- Ask yourself: How do the sounds in this speech help us to understand how Portia is feeling?
- Watch the film of this scene in the 2015 RSC performance on the same [page](#).

EXTENSION

- Watch the film of The Casket Scene in performance [here](#).
- Ask yourself: How were the caskets brought to life in the 2015 production?
- Visit the photo gallery in the 'imagine' section to compare the caskets in past RSC productions.
- Design the gold, silver and lead caskets. Look back at Act 2 Scene 7 and Act 2 Scene 9 to find clues for details that you might include.

13 - PORTIA

What is at stake between Portia and Bassanio?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 3 Scene 2 from The Merchant of Venice, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Relationships page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#).
- Working out why Portia helps Bassanio can be key to understanding and interpreting the play. Click on 'View the Information' and read the information about Portia. Note the clues about these characters and their relationship in Act 3 Scene 2.
- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 2 where Portia gives Bassanio a ring. Read aloud from where Portia says "*Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours is now converted*" to the end of her speech.
- Ask yourself: Why does Portia give Bassanio the ring? What does the ring represent?
- Antonio writes to Bassanio from prison to tell him that he has lost his ships, cannot re-pay Shylock and has broken the bond. He will have to pay a pound of flesh to the money lender.
- Imagine you are Antonio and write that letter to Bassanio.
- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 2 where Portia says: "*Is it your dear friend that is thus in trouble?*" Read aloud from there up to where Bassanio reads Antonio's letter to Portia.
- Imagine you are Portia, and you have just heard the contents of the letter. Write down one word which describes Portia's feelings. Write down what Portia would like to say and who she would like to say it to. Write down what Portia would like to do, and why.
- Read the line that Portia says just after she has heard the letter. Put that line into your own words. Ask yourself: Why do you think that Portia says that to Bassanio? How would you describe Portia at this moment? Make notes about this moment and what it reveals about Portia's character.
- Write a few sentences which describe what is at stake between Portia and Bassanio, and why she decides to help him.
- Visit the photo gallery of Portia in past RSC productions on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Compare the ways in which Portia is portrayed on stage. Which version is closest to the way in which you are imagining Portia, and why?

EXTENSION

- Visit the Language Analysis page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#) and click on 'Analysing Portia's language' to fill out the grid and analyse Portia's language in Act 3 Scene 2.

14 - CROSS DRESSING

How do Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as men?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 3 Scene 4 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 4 where Portia says, “Lorenzo, I commit into your hands.” Read from there until the end of the scene. On a big piece of paper, write lists of what others say about Portia, what Portia says and what she does.
- Read aloud Portia’s speech which starts, “They shall, Nerissa...” As you read, hit your thigh every time you say a word which describes men or male behaviour.
- Choose at least four phrases from the speech which describe male behaviour.
- Speak your chosen phrases and make actions and gestures to go with the words, as if you are Portia teaching Nerissa how to behave like a man.
- At the end of the scene Portia tells Nerissa that she has a plan. Write down what you think the plan is, using the clues in Act 3 Scene 4, including why they need to dress and behave as men.
- Visit the Performance page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on ‘gender’ under ‘key decisions to make’, and ask yourself the questions that are there.

EXTENSION

- Experiment with what you have at home to see if you can cross dress believably. What will you wear? Will you have to do anything to disguise how you usually wear your hair? Can you find anything which you could carry which helps you to pull off your transformation?
- Once you are satisfied with how you have cross dressed, experiment with how you might behave to make the illusion complete.
- Ask yourself: Why do you think Shakespeare chooses for Portia to dress as a man in *The Merchant of Venice*? What effect do you think that cross dressing has on the audience?

15 - THE VENETIAN COURT

Designing the Venetian Court

WHAT YOU NEED

- A big piece of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Read the opening of Act 4 Scene 1, up to the Duke's line, "Make room and let him stand before our face". Ask yourself: How do the rest of the characters address the Duke? The Duke is the ruler of Venice and he is also the judge in the Venetian Court. How might the other characters behave towards the Duke?
- Visit the Past Productions page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#) and click on The Venetian Court to investigate this setting. Look at the picture gallery and work through the things to consider.
- Using a big piece of paper, draw a floor plan for this scene. Mark on your floor plan where the entrances into the court are, where the audience will be, and where the characters will be placed. Think about the mechanics of cutting and weighing a pound of flesh from Antonio, what equipment might be needed, and mark what and where that should be. Ask yourself whether religion is important in this setting, and what you might include on stage to help the audience understand that.
- Read again the stage directions in the section of the scene you have read.
- Use counters, plastic figures or create your own models to represent all the characters in that section, and experiment with how the characters will move onto the stage.

EXTENSION

- Create a soundscape for the opening section of the scene.
- Write a list of what you might be able to hear in the Venetian Court as it assembles. What sounds might you use to create the atmosphere? Include any sounds that might go with the feelings at this moment, such as the beating of a heart. What sound will you use for the moment when Shylock enters?
- Record all the sounds you will need to create the atmosphere.
- Edit together what you have recorded, to create a soundscape with a beginning, climax and end.
- Play your soundscape as you read aloud the opening section of the scene.

16 - THE TRIAL

How does the language of Act 4 Scene 1 create the atmosphere of the trial before Portia enters?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A big piece of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Find Shylock's speech in Act 4 Scene 1 which begins "*I have possessed your grace of what I purpose.*" Read it aloud, breathing only when there is a full stop or a question mark at the end of a sentence. Ask yourself: What pace do you have to speak at? How is Shylock feeling when he speaks this speech and why? Note down your ideas.
- Find Antonio's speech which begins, "*I pray you think you question with the Jew.*" Read it aloud. Ask yourself: What things does Antonio compare Shylock's harshness to? How effective are these comparisons? Who do you think Antonio is talking to during this speech? Bassanio? The Duke? Shylock? The whole court? What might be the reactions of the other characters to Antonio's speech? Note down your ideas.
- Find Gratiano's speech which begins "*O be thou damned, inexecrable dog.*" Read it aloud, emphasising and exaggerating the sounds in the words and growling any words to do with dogs and wolves. Ask yourself: Why does Gratiano compare Shylock to a wolf? How do you think Gratiano is feeling? Note down your ideas.
- Imagine these three moments in the Venetian Court. For each one, make a sketch of the speaker and label it with one or two lines of text from their speech.
- Write a title for each of your sketches.
- Write a couple of sentences to describe how the language of Act 4 Scene 1 creates the atmosphere of the trial before Portia enters.

EXTENSION

- Imagine you are a court reporter, witnessing these events in court. Write a report of what happens, explaining who said what and what effect their words had on the rest of the people in court. You could illustrate your report with appropriate images, either drawn or found online.

17 - THE QUALITY OF MERCY

What is Portia trying to achieve in this speech?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit this Language page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#), to read and explore the speech.
- Imagine you are Portia. Read the speech aloud, as if you are giving a lecture to the whole court of Venice. Every time you feel you have made a good point, write a tick on a piece of paper. How many ticks do you have by the end of the speech?
- Read the speech aloud again, this time whispering it, as if you are persuading Shylock to show mercy. Every time you feel you have persuaded Shylock, write a tick. This time, how many ticks do you have?
- Ask yourself: which parts of the speech felt better spoken to the whole court? Which parts felt better spoken directly to Shylock? What do you think Portia is trying to achieve in this speech? What is her objective? Note down your discoveries.
- Imagine you are Shylock listening to this speech. What questions might he want to ask, and when? Write those questions down.
- Now imagine you are Bassanio listening to this speech. What comments might he want to make, and when? Write those comments down.
- Watch the film of this speech in performance from the 2015 RSC production [here](#).
- Ask yourself: What difference do the reactions of the other characters in court make to this version of the speech? What would you say Portia was trying to achieve? How does this compare with the objective you chose?
- Write a couple of sentences explaining what Portia is trying to achieve in this speech and the tactics she uses to reach her objective.

EXTENSION

- This is one of the most famous speeches in Shakespeare's plays. Imagine Portia is unable to get to the court in person, so has to send in a film of the speech for the court to watch.
- Film yourself speaking the speech, as if you are Portia. Think about what you are trying to achieve through the film. Experiment with different camera angles, close ups and long shots.

18 - THE RING

What does the ring mean to Portia and Bassanio?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- In Act 3 Scene 2, Portia gave Bassanio a ring, which he promised never to remove. Ask yourself: What does the ring mean to Portia? What does the ring mean to Bassanio?
- Find the place towards the end of Act 4 Scene 1 where the Duke exits. Read from Bassanio's speech, "Most worthy gentleman, ..." to the end of the scene.
- Bassanio offers Portia, who is in disguise as Balthazar, a tribute for saving Antonio's life. She first requests his gloves, and as he takes them off, she recognizes and requests the ring that he is wearing.
- Imagine you are Bassanio. Take two pieces of paper and put them on opposite sides of the room. On one piece write a list of all the reasons why Bassanio SHOULD NOT give 'Balthazar' the ring. On the other piece, write a list of all the reasons why he SHOULD. Walk between the two pieces of paper as you add to your ideas.
- When you have written down all your ideas, walk between the two pieces of paper as if you are Bassanio, reading aloud each reason. What does this tell you about how Bassanio might be feeling?
- Bassanio does not give 'Balthazar' the ring. How might the audience re-act to this moment?
- Put what Antonio says after Balthazar has gone into your own words.
- Ask yourself: Why does Bassanio decide to give the ring to 'Balthazar' after all?
- Watch this clip [here](#) of Polly Findlay (director) and Patsy Ferran (who played Portia in the RSC 2015 production) discuss her role.
- Ask yourself: What is funny about the end of Act 4 Scene 1? Is it typical of a romantic comedy? Write a couple of sentences to capture your ideas.
- Ask yourself: What does the ring mean to Portia? Why do you think she tests Bassanio by asking for it? How do you think she feels when he sends it to her, thinking she is 'Balthazar'? Write a couple of sentences to capture your ideas.

EXTENSION

- Design the ring that Portia gives Bassanio. Think about what the ring means to her, and what she is offering to Bassanio with it. You could include an engraved inscription inspired by the language of the play. Draw your designs. Label your design to show the materials it is made of and explain why you have made your design choices.

19 - A HAPPY ENDING?

To what extent does *The Merchant of Venice* end happily?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 5 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Read the opening section of Act 5 Scene 1 between Jessica and Lorenzo, up to Jessica's line, "And ne'er a true one."
- Read aloud what Jessica says at the end of this section, as if she is in love, teasing Lorenzo.
- Read what she says again, as if she is regretting leaving her home and culture for Lorenzo.
- Ask yourself: How well do you think they Jessica and Lorenzo knew each other when she ran away from home? What do you predict for their future together?
- Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on 'The Resolution' to investigate the ending of the play. Look at the picture gallery and work through the 'things to consider'.
- Find the place in Act 5 Scene 1, where Portia says, "Here is a letter, read it at your leisure". Read from there to the end of the scene.
- Write a list of everything that happens in that section of the scene in the order that it happens.
- Using a separate piece of paper for each character who is on stage at the end of the play, write their names down.
- On each character's piece of paper, write their secret feelings and thoughts at the end of the play.
- Arrange the character papers that you can into couples. Where would you put the other characters in relation to the couples?
- Make another piece of paper for Shylock. List what he has lost by the end of the play. The Duke has ordered that he should convert to Christianity at the end of Act 4 Scene 1. Write Shylock's secret thoughts and feelings on his character paper. Place Shylock in relation to the other characters.
- Ask yourself: To what extent does *The Merchant of Venice* end happily?
- Take a photograph of your arrangement.

EXTENSION

- Using your photograph and what you have found out from investigating the ending of *The Merchant of Venice*, design a storyboard for a comic book or graphic novel.

- Use as many panels or frames in your storyboard as you need to show the whole ending of the play. Remember to include lines from the play and the characters' thoughts, as well as their actions.

20 - THE THEMES

What are the themes in *The Merchant of Venice*?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Pieces of paper, a notebook, and something to write or draw with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit these pages on [Language Analysis](#) and [Themes](#) of the play.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Language Analysis page on the RSC Learning Zone [here](#). Click on 'analysing themes'. Three of the main themes of *The Merchant of Venice* are included on that page.
- Read the information and advice for exploring each theme.
- There are other themes in the play to explore. Visit the RSC website [here](#) to find out more.
- Select the theme from the play which is the most relevant and important to you.
- Make a collage which explores that theme. You must include quotes from the play which are relevant to that theme. Include characters that link to that theme. Include significant props or objects from the play which are relevant to that theme, and draw them. You could find ways of representing characters or props using google images, pictures from old magazines, re-cycled materials or fabric scraps.
- Share your collage with someone, either at home or online. Take them through your creative process and thinking. Make sure you include the quotes you have chosen and why you have chosen them.

EXTENSION

- Repeat this process, to make collages for other themes in the play.
- You could display your collages, thinking about the relationship between the themes.